



NKHOTAKOTA

WILDLIFE RESERVE
MALAWI

AFRICAN PARKS PROJECT SINCE 2015

Area: 1,800 km²

Malawi Department of National Parks and Wildlife (DNPW)

Key Funders: Dutch Postcode Lottery, People's Postcode Lottery, Stichting Dioraphte, The Wyss Foundation, WWF-Belgium

280 bird species

486 elephants were reintroduced from 2016 to 2017



The Story of Nkhotakota

Nkhotakota Wildlife Reserve has a tainted past. Decades of lawlessness and poaching virtually exterminated the reserve's wildlife, reducing the once healthy elephant population of 1,500 to fewer than 100 by 2015. With limited wildlife and little to no tourism, Nkhotakota was of little value for the surrounding communities who continued to harvest its natural resources. In 2015 African Parks signed a long-term management agreement with the Department of National Parks and Wildlife (DNPW) to restore this expansive 1,800 km² reserve, changing its trajectory and bringing hope and possibility to the region. We immediately overhauled law enforcement and trained and outfitted a new ranger unit to prevent poaching and to secure the park. An active community engagement program began to help prevent illegal activities as well as to mitigate human-wildlife conflict; and we then began preparing for the historic elephant translocation to help revive the park. By August 2017, we had translocated 486 elephant and 2,000 game animals to Nkhotakota. Extreme measures have been taken to actively restore this landscape, and with the return of wildlife, tourism has begun to increase, and the surrounding communities are starting to experience the tangible benefits of a well-managed reserve through improved access to education and healthcare services. It is still early days for this vast reserve, but in only two short years, we have been able to demonstrate what nature can do with our help if only given the chance.



The Challenge

Nkhotakota's long-term future is largely dependent on the nearly 107,000 people living within five kilometres of the reserve's boundary, and it is essential that these communities value and in some way benefit from the reserve's existence. Historically, communities depended on the reserve's natural resources for survival and this led to the severe depletion of many key wildlife species and the degradation of the reserve's ecosystems. Competing with wildlife for limited resources on the reserve's boundaries resulted in consistent human-wildlife conflict in the absence of a well-maintained perimeter fence. Nkhotakota's long-term future is reliant on providing sustainable livelihood opportunities for the communities, and the prevention and mitigation of conflict situations, while both human and wildlife populations increase.

Highlights

- 486 elephants and over 2,000 game animals were translocated to Nkhotakota between 2016 to 2017 to help revive the reserve.
- Law enforcement and community teams have collected hundreds of wire snares, filled in pit traps and confiscated illegal firearms to help secure the reserve.
- Sustainable livelihoods for the communities surrounding Nkhotakota is vital for decreasing the pressure on the park's natural resources; innovative solutions for community livelihoods have been created and include supporting the park's 23 morning clubs and five beekeeping clubs.
- More than 710 students from 22 different schools visited the reserve in 2017 as part of the environmental education programme aimed at building a constituency for conservation in the surrounding community.

The Solution

African Parks is restoring the reserve to its former glory and ensuring the adequate protection of its existing wildlife and the safety of communities. By implementing stringent law enforcement measures, training and equipping rangers with the latest technology, and the maintenance of the newly constructed perimeter fence to prevent human-wildlife conflict we are starting to see positive results. Nkhotakota has established community engagement programmes to address areas of need, such as water provision, sustainable resource harvesting, healthcare and education. A large-scale wildlife translocation project was undertaken over 2016 to 2017 to aid in the recovery of wildlife in Nkhotakota, and to ultimately increase tourism and employment, to create a conservation-led economy for the area.

Next Steps

- 1 Continue to monitor the elephant population and mitigate human-wildlife conflict.
- 2 Conduct ecological research including impacts of reintroduced elephants.
- 3 Modernise law enforcement with technology, upgrades and advanced training.
- 4 Complete phase three of the perimeter fencing and other essential infrastructure.
- 5 Continue to implement the community engagement strategy.
- 6 Operationalise Bua and Tongole tourism concessions to increase revenue.



African Parks is a non-profit conservation organisation that takes on direct responsibility for the rehabilitation and long-term management of national parks and protected areas, in partnership with governments and local communities. We currently manage 15 parks in nine countries – Benin, CAR, Chad, Republic of Congo, DRC, Malawi, Mozambique, Rwanda, Zambia – with a combined area of 10.5 million hectares. Our goal is to have 20 parks under management by 2020.